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ABSTRACT

Meeting the needs of disabled college students within the limits of the rural institution's resources is a challenge to all rural educators. Support services which must be provided can be divided into two categories: core services, such as classroom assistance and housing, and comprehensive environmental services, such as admissions, registration, medical facilities, transportation, financial aid, and special equipment. While rural areas do not have the resources of urban areas, they can develop innovative ways to meet these needs by using economical institutional and local resources. One full-time person in the Dean of Student Affairs office can generally meet many of the disabled student's personal and academic needs. A local vocational rehabilitation counselor not only provides important services but also links with other service providers. Finally, a variety of volunteer services may be provided by typically rural community resources: the 4H Club, Future Farmers of America, the Lion's Club, and religious groups. (LP)

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# SERVING THE DISABLED COLLEGE STUDENT IN RURAL INSTITUTIONS

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# SERVING THE DISABLED COLLEGE STUDENT IN RURAL INSTITUTIONS

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Shifting enrollment patterns over the last decade have caused an upsurge in the enrollment of "nontraditional" students. Many non-traditional students, because they are not traditional, require a different blend of services than do traditional students. Provision of these services within the limited rural resource base can be discussed, but "rural" and "services" must first be defined.

Universities located in rural areas may have disproportionate numbers of non-traditional students depending on the demographics of the institutional service area and local employment levels. Meeting the non-traditional student's service needs within the limits of the rural institution's resource base presents a challenge to all rural educators.

Determining if an institution is rural in nature is a complex issue involving many variables. These include enrollment, population of the host community, distance to the nearest major population center, the local economic base, and other demographic and institutional variables. An informal "working" definition suggests that a rural institution is one at which the rural/non-rural role definition is taken for granted. Additionally, an institution may have mixed rural/non-rural characteristics. For these reasons, many institutions may have to determine if they are rural for the purpose of this paper.

The student with a physical disability is a non-traditional student who may require many services in order to fully access the college experience. These services may involve access to the actual physical plant of the institution or other assistance needed to allow the student access to programs of the institution.

Several questions allow a definition of "students with disabilities." What is a student with a disability? Are students with handicaps different from students with disabilities? When is a student disabled enough to receive services, and what services should they receive?

The Department of Education, in the Section 504 regulations, set forth the concept of "....substantial interference with one or more major life activities..." as part of its definition of "handicap" and handicapping conditions (HEW 1977, Dept. of ED 1981). The following condensation of that definition is helpful in answering the previous questions.

A person whose disability does NOT interfere with one or more major life activities is not handicapped under the law. However, they are still disabled, and when that person engages in an activity that is limited by the disability, he/she is considered handicapped. As an example, a student missing three fingers on their non-dominant hand does have a disability, but not necessarily a handicap. If they must meet a typing requirement in order to graduate, then they become "handicapped" within the scope of Section 504.

This sort of definition is a useful, flexible tool for persons providing services to students because it allows common sense to be applied to individual cases. Rather than defining handicap by class; i.e., amputation, the effect of the individual disability is considered.

Actual support services may be split into two categories using a definition based on functional disability: (1) core services for academic support and (2) comprehensive environmental services (Klopping 1975, 1977, Brill 1979) to allow access to the non-classroom environment.

Core services often include:

*Classroom Assistance*
- a. *Notetakers*
- b. *Interpreters*
- c. *Examination assistance*
- d. *Readers/writers*

*Services for Visually Impaired*
- a. *Reader service*
- b. *Library assistance*
- c. *Resource center*
- d. *Alternate media production*

*Housing*
- a. *Accessible on-campus*
- b. *Accessible off-campus*

Comprehensive environmental services often include:

*Admissions*
- a. *Early identification*
- b. *Special "handicapped" slots*

*Registration*
- a. *Special assistance*
- b. *Priority scheduling*
- c. *Priority pre-registration*
- d. *Policy of accessibility*

*Architectural Barriers*
- a. *Knowledge of all barriers*
- b. *Program of removal*
- c. *Access routes*
- d. *Information sheet*

Comprehensive environmental services also include: medical care, parking, attendant care, financial aids, a mobility center, and equipment pool, and programs designed to facilitate the removal of attitudinal barriers.

Service providers in a rural state generally do not have access to many of the resources needed to provide core and comprehensive environmental services as they are typically provided in non-rural areas. The lack of traditional resources in rural areas is a "blessing in disguise." Providers are forced to utilize external resources to provide services that an urban institution budgets into its office for handicapped students.

In the rural secondary/post-secondary setting, both internal and external resources are available to the service provider. Developing methods of utilizing these resources to replace more traditional disabled student services is one of the challenges of rural services For example, most high school, community college and university industrial arts shops have both the skilled personnel and the tools to fabricate wheelchair parts or accessories. Most wheelchair repairs can be made by unskilled persons if supervised by a knowledgeable wheelchair user.

The ability to provide this type of "on-site" service is of special value to the isolated institution for, although the service is not "professionally provided," it is provided in an appropriate and timely manner. The more isolated the institution, the more necessary "on-site" services from non-traditional providers become. An example of

the value in local service provision is that of Western Wyoming College in Rock Springs, Wyoming. The nearest wheelchair repair facilities to the college are in Salt Lake City, Utah, or Cheyenne, Wyoming. Both involve approximately five hours of driving, in good weather. To rely solely on out of town resources to repair wheelchairs practically guarantees one to three days of "down" time in the event of wheelchair failure. The availability of local repair can dramatically reduce time missed due to equipment failure. Similar procedures can be developed for other needed services and left dormant until needed.

Many core and comprehensive services can be administered (or coordinated) in rural areas with a minimum of difficulty by a single person in the Dean of Students Office (or high school counseling office). For other services such as personal care aides or homemaker services, the local department of public assistance and social services may be a resource.

Additional resources within the State Government are:

- Department of Special Education
- Department of Education for the Blind
- Governor's Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped
- Department of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Agriculture Extension Service

The most important of these resources for the rural educator is Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), as VR counselors are excellent resource persons and have a statutory responsibility to assist persons with disabilities (within agency guidelines) in identifying, training for, and obtaining an appropriate level of employment. Because VR often does not identify potential clients until they graduate from high school, high school counselors should work with VR to determine student eligibility during the freshman/sophomore year, as suggested by Cavanagh (1973).

Within the community college districts or college service area, liaison between postsecondary service providers, vocational rehabilitation, and high school counselors (or resource teachers) is important. In rural areas, where mustering resources to meet needs is a constant challenge, both liason and cooperation become vital. Although VR eligibility may not be determined at the start of high school, academic tracking toward postsecondary education is already underway. It is included in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), as required by PL 94-142, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act. A linkage between the Vocational Rehabilitation Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan and the IEP may result in improved educational and rehabilitation services during the student's secondary education.

Because Vocational Rehabilitation can serve students at both the secondary and post-secondary levels, the VR counselor can link the high school counselor with the post-secondary service provider, thus assisting the student in creating a post-secondary IEP.

The post-secondary IEP is a tool well suited to rural, low resource areas. By linking the IWRP to the IEP and then projecting the student's needs to the post-secondary level in a plan format, the post-secondary service provider is able to more accurately plan future resource allocation. The advance notice inherent in the post-secondary IEP allows the service provider to develop resources on a non-crisis basis. This frees resources for the benefit of all enrolled students with disabilities.

Most communities served by local post-secondary institutions have a wealth of local resources to utilize as tools to better serve students. Local service organizations such as Lions, Optimists, Moose, 4-H, and Future Farmers of America and others are often helpful for meeting special needs, and providing on-going assistance. Local Lions Clubs may provide scholarships to students with disabilities or donate special equipment to the school. Religious groups and local senior citizens programs are also helpful in providing volunteer services.

Recently, use of microcomputers as assistive devices for persons with disabilities has received a great deal of publicity. Because of the potential value of microcomputing to the person with a disability, computer science faculty, local computer clubs or computer hobbyists should be utilized as resources.

If necessary, additional technical assistance for service providers in community colleges is available through the Association on Handicapped Student Service Programs in Post-Secondary Education (AHSSPPE). The Higher Education and the Handicapped Resource Center is another major resource.

The location and management of scarce resources in rural areas of vital interest to those persons serving the student with a disability. As the student with a disability is often a member of other "non-traditional" groups as well, cooperation of internal and external services becomes important. Using the Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan and the Individual Educational Plan to write an Individual Postsecondary Educational plan for/with the student and other resource persons will allow the post-secondary service provider to plan resource allocation and development for the benefit of all students. By accessing the institutional and local resources mentioned earlier the student with a disability may be served locally, often with minimal expense to the institution or service district.

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